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Western Religion and the Self-Canceling of Modernity

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Abstract
The extreme character of western modernity is the result of the interaction of two contradictory processes. On the one hand, the cultivation of interiority, reflexivity, and thus of subjective freedom, which antedates Christianity, and which is also found in other cultures, but which Christianity intensified by equating religion with 'faith.' On the other, the need to assert one's freedom against the attempts on the part of a church, which, while promoting the exploration of the sinful subjectivity of all Christians—understood primarily as believers—sought to control all of reality, external and internal. While the emergence of a reflexive, tolerant self has led many in the West to the abandonment of its traditional institutional religion, that same tolerant reflexivity renders difficult dealing with the demands of groups—Christian and non-Christian—that seek to abolish modernity.

Keywords
modernity, religion, Europe, Christianity, Catholicism, secularization, sexuality, Enlightenment

1. Introduction: Modernity, Modernities

When in Carolingian times the awareness of living in an age that was different from that of early Christianity led theologians such as Paschasius Radbertus to use with increasing frequency the term *modernus* to refer to the period in which they were living, these authors inaugurated a trend that has remained in place to this day. After the Carolingians, *modernus*, the term coined by Cassiodorus in the sixth century, has remained in place as part of an implicit or explicit opposition between the old and the new: witness the debates between the *antiqui et moderni* in the twelfth century and the *querelle des*

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anciens et modernes, five centuries later.[1] This timeless use of the term 'modern' is also found in the scholarly literature, in some cases to refer to periods which ordinary readers are likely to consider as embodiments of obscurantism. An example of this can be found in Jean-Claude Schmitt's reference to "*la 'modernité' de l'Occident médiéval*"[2]—the quotation marks Schmitt places around '*modernité*' pointing to the unexpectedness of the juxtaposition. No less unexpected, given widespread presuppositions, is the mention of the "*Anfänge der Aufklärung im Mittelalter*" ("The Beginnings of Enlightenment in the Middle Ages") in the subtitle of a book devoted to the presentation of rationalistic, skeptical, atheistic, and materialistic trends in Western Europe long before the period generally identified with the Enlightenment.[3] Were one to move from the western to the eastern part of Eurasia, one might be even more surprised by the joint mention of modernity of Buddhism.[4]

In light of this proliferation, one is entitled to ask whether 'modernity' is not in fact a meaningless term, and whether, in order to avoid terminological vacuousness, it would not be better to reserve it for developments that took place in parts of Europe sometime between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. Such limitation would indeed be justified if by 'modernity' one meant exclusively the confluence of intellectual reflexivity, political upheaval, technological innovation and the ability to exercise power over human beings and nature,[5] that took place in Western Europe

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1) Walter Freund, *Modernus und andere Zeitbegriffe des Mittelalters* (Cologne & Graz: Böhlau, 1957); Albert Zimmermann (ed.), *Antiqui und Moderni: Traditionsbewußtsein im späten Mittelalter* (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1974); Hans Robert Jauß, "Ursprung und Bedeutung der Fortschrittsidee in der 'Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes,'" in: Helmut Kuhn & Franz Wiedman (eds.), *Die Philosophie und die Frage nach dem Fortschritt* (Munich: Anton Pustet, 1964), 51–72, 305–308; Gustavo Benavides, "Modernity," in: Mark C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: Chicago University Press 1998), 186–204, where further references can be found.

2) Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Le corps, les rites, les rêves, le temps: essais d'anthropologie médiévale* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 27.

3) Kurt Flasch & Udo Reinhold Jeck (eds.), *Das Licht der Vernunft: Die Anfänge der Aufklärung im Mittelalter* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1997).

4) See Gustavo Benavides, "Modernity and Buddhism," in: Robert E. Buswell (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (New York: Macmillan, 2003), vol. 2, 544–549, as well as the University of Chicago Press series, *Buddhism and Modernity,* edited by Donald S. Lopez.

5) On the connection between modernity and the "ability to create power," see Mark Elvin, "A Working Definition of 'Modernity,'" *Past and Present* 113 (1986), 209–213.

since the seventeenth century. If, however, one wishes to refer to a variety of situations in which a distancing from the past is self-consciously sought, one may think in terms of multiple modernities, being forced to resort to the terminology with which one is familiar, much as one is condemned to use terms with a specific history—'religion,' 'language,' or 'history' itself—when trying to make sense of clusters of human practices, which otherwise would have to be referred to using cumbersome circumlocutions, or whose existence one would be forced to deny, claiming that they are merely the result of Western terminological imperialism—that self-incriminating claim being itself the result of the reflexivity that characterizes modernity.

In any event, being aware of the multiplicity of cases that involve the taking of distance in a self-conscious manner, instead of saying that 'modernity' is the cause of that distancing, it would be less reifying to say that the term 'modernity' may be applied in a tentative manner to situations in which self-conscious separation from a hitherto taken for granted way of life on the part of a significant number of individuals results in substantial cultural changes, even when such changes are not accompanied by technological advances. The fact that, being in principle an endless process, the self-distancing to which the label 'modernity' may be applied continues to this day, allows us to dispense with the spurious claim that our current modernity has been left behind, having been replaced by an alleged 'post-modernity.' In reality, since all cases of modernity are constituted by an implicit or explicit 'post' as well as by a relentless exercise in reflexivity, the very postulation of 'post-modernity' is but an instance of the desire to establish a distance between our modernity—*modernitas nostra*, to employ the expression used by Berthold of Reichenau around 1075—and the preceding ones.[6]

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[6] The peculiar anxiety that led to the invention of 'post-modernity' is due, among other things, to the pressures of an academic market which, like the larger market within which it is located, constantly demands new products, or at least new packaging; a more insidious factor in the promotion of 'post-modernity' is the still unfinished struggle with the eighteenth century; on this issue see Darrin McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 202; Zeev Sternhell, *Les anti-Lumières. Du XVIII^e siècle à la guerre froide* (Paris: Fayard, 2006), esp. 549–553 (the conclusion of Sternhell's demolition of Isaiah Berlin).

2. Extrication, Coercion, and Interiority in the Genesis of Modernity

In the West, the desire to establish distance can also be seen in the early attempts on the part of bodies of doctrinal-ritual functionaries to extricate from a relatively undifferentiated social reality a religious domain, which, while seeking to preserve its distinctiveness and autonomy as a 'church,' sought at the same time to rule all of reality, external and internal, being incapable of tolerating competing ritual practices and, above all, doctrinal claims. This process of extrication, present in Christianity, but also in world religions such as Buddhism and Manichaeism, can free people from the limitations of locality and of tradition, thus leading to the emergence of attitudes and in some cases of social arrangements that can be considered as 'modern.'[7] What contributed in a circuitous manner to the extreme character of western modernity is the fact that, in addition to the concern with subjectivity—found also in Buddhism and Manichaeism—Christianity managed to create a centralized system of administration which sought to regulate all of reality, thus forcing difference to become dissidence. We witness in western Christendom since the time of Gregory VII the strengthening of the authority exercised by the papacy over aspects of life that would be now considered as religious, as well as over others that would be regarded now as falling under the jurisdiction of civil or penal law. Exaggerated and even apologetic as Berman's reference to a papal "revolution" may be,[8] the process he describes is compatible with the general impetus that led to the emergence of a Christian religious realm, generated by the refusal to separate inner conviction from ritual practice.

What we must consider now is how the never to be resolved tension between a church that encouraged, in principle, the deepening of one's convictions regarding one's god, while at the same time seeking to administer all of reality, internal and external—while regarding itself as a juridically

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7) The process of extrication that leads to the emergence of a 'religious' realm is discussed in Gustavo Benavides, "Die Moderne im Zwiespalt der Religionen," in: Hans G. Kippenberg, Jörg Rüpke & Kocku von Stuckrad (eds.), *Europäische Religionsgeschichte: Ein Handbuch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, forthcoming 2008).

8) *In Law and Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 118, Berman claims that it was the "Papal revolution" that "introduced into Western history the experience of revolution itself"—one would be tempted rather to regard Hildebrand's as a *coup d'état* that lasted for about seven centuries.

and ritually delimited domain—contributed to the extreme character of western modernity. The situation was unambiguous when Christians were not able to exercise power, for at that time one's convictions as a Christian had effects only on oneself. This was the case in the late second century, when, in his *Apologeticum* (24,6), Tertullian denounced being deprived of religious freedom and of choosing one's deity[9] as *irreligiositas*; and in the early third century,[10] when, in the letter to Scapula (2,2), Tertullian wrote that it is not proper for religion to compel to religion.[11] The same was true, about a century later, when Lactantius, reacting to the persecution under Diocletian, wrote in the *Divine Institutes*, that "worship cannot be forced; it is something to be achieved by talk rather than blows, so that there is free will in it" (5,19,11),[12] for "there is nothing that is so much a matter of willingness as religion" (5,19,23).[13] The contradiction between the promotion of inner freedom and the desire to exercise control appeared when, having achieved power, Christians were persecuting pagans.[14] This prompted the

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9) Jean-Pierre Waltzing (trans./ed.), *Tertullien,* Apologétique (second edition, Paris: Les belles lettres, 1961), 61: "*Videte enim, ne et hoc ad irreligiositatis elogium concurrat, adimere libertatem religionis et interdicere optione diuinitatis, ut non liceat mihi colere quem uelim, sed cogar colere quem nolim. Nemo se ab inuito coli uolet, ne homo quidem.*"

10) After reviewing the evidence, Antonio Quacquarelli proposes the fall of 212; see Antonio Quacquarelli (ed.), *Q.S.F. Tertulliani* Ad Scapulam: *prolegomeni, testo critico e commento* (Rome: Desclée et socii – editores ponteficii, 1957), 43–45.

11) *Ad Scapulam 2, 2: "sed nec religionis est cogere religionem, quae sponte suscipi debeat, non vi, cum et hostiae ab animo libenti expostulentur.*" Text in Quacquarelli (ed.), *Tertulliani* Ad Scapulam, 58; see also Vincentivs Bulhart (ed.), *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani Opera,* Pars quarta (Vindobonae: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1957), 10. An Italian translation accompanied by exhaustive introduction, critical apparatus and commentary can be found in Pier Angelo Gramaglia (ed.), *Tertulliano,* A Scapula: *introduzione, traduzione e note* (Rome: Edizione Paoline, 1980).

12) "*Non est opus ui et iniuria, quia religio cogi non potest, uerbis potius quam uerberibus res agenda est, ut sit uoluntas.*" From Pierre Monat (ed.), *Lactance*, Institutions Divines: *introduction, texte critique, traduction*, Livre V, Tome 1 (Paris: Cerf, 1973), 232. The English version can be found in Anthony Bowen & Peter Garnsey (eds.), *Lactantius*, Divine Institutes: *Translated with Introduction and Notes* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), 320.

13) "*Nihil est enim tam uoluntarium quam religio*"; quoted from Monat (ed.), *Lactance,* Institutions Divines, 236; see Bowen & Garnsey (eds.), *Lactantius,* Divine Institutes, 321–322.

14) Clifford Ando, "Pagan Apologetics and Christian Intolerance in the Ages of Themistius and Augustine," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4 (1996), 171–207. In "Lambs into Lions: Explaining Early Christian Intolerance," *Past and Present* 153 (1996), 3–36, H.A. Drake does not pay attention to the doctrinal basis of Christian intolerance.

pagan rhetorician Themistius to lecture Jovian, the Christian successor of Julian, about the need to respect individual religious choices in an oration he delivered on 1 January 364.[15] Religion seeks to overcome impositions and threats (67C), said Themistius, the exercise of devotion being dependent on each person's will (68A). Themistius even talked about the advantages of religious competition and emulation (68D), adding that he was tempted to say that perhaps God does not like that there be total harmony among men (69B).

What we have in these cases, involving, first, Christians persecuted by pagans, and, later, pagans persecuted by Christians, is a collection of claims that could have been made today; in other words, if one had been confronted with some of the points made by Tertullian, Lactantius, and Themistius without knowing that they had been uttered in the second, third, and fourth centuries, one might have thought that these were modern statements.[16] Without disregarding the influence of Stoic ideas about inner freedom, could we not ask whether Themistius' "axiom that moral and religious matters lie outside the sphere of legislation"[17] was made possible by the fact that the confrontation between Christianity and Roman paganism delimited—or perhaps just rendered visible—a religious realm?

It is in the peculiar concern with believing the right doctrine, and indeed with belief as such, as well as with Christians being considered primarily as believers,[18] that Christianity shows its distinctiveness. It is the single-minded promotion of the exploration of one's subjectivity that, ultimately,

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15) Greek text and Italian translation in Riccardo Maisano (ed.), *Discorsi di Temistio* (Turin: UTET, 1995), 265–287.

16) It is therefore difficult to agree with the statement found in F. Paschoud, "L'intolérance chrétienne vue et jugée par les païens," *Cristianesimo nella storia* 11 (1990), 545–577, to the effect that a fourth century pagan "is not able to conceive of the idea of freedom of worship" (*"ne peut même pas concevoir l'idée théoretique de la liberté des cultes*," 551). More accurate is Giuseppe Struglia, who speaks of "*la modernità di Temistio*"; see "Razionalità e dogmatismo nell'evoluzione dell'idea della toleranza religiosa nell'antiquità e nel medioevo," *Annali delle Facoltà di lettere, filosofia e magistero dell'Università di Cagliari* 27 (1959), 341–413, p. 365.

17) Peter Garnsey, "Religious Toleration in Classical Antiquity," *Studies in Church History* 21 (1984), 1–27, p. 21; see also Lawrence J. Daly, "Themistius' Plea for Religious Tolerance." *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 12 (1971), 65–79; Juan José Sayas, "La tolerancia religiosa y sus diversas aportaciones," *Hipania antiqua* 3 (1973), 219–260, pp. 250–260; Ando, "Pagan Apologetics."

18) See M. Ruel, "Christians as Believers," in: J. Davis (ed.), *Religious Organization and Religious Experience* (London: Academic Press, 1982), 9–31.

could be turned around by dissidents, serving now as the basis for resisting claims that violated their convictions. What is significant from the angle of modernity is the fact that without the absolute claims made by the Roman church about the reality and the proper interpretation of a set of texts available in a language whose mastery was reserved to clerics, those who attempted to contest the church's claims would not have been forced into a radically adversarial—and, generally, equally intolerant[19]—position. Nor would have those critics been forced to rely on their own intellectual, moral and emotional resources—thus deepening them—without the presence of a powerful transnational entity convinced of the truth of its position as well as of its god-given right to extirpate dissent using all the means available, including charitable violence.[20] Beginning in the eleventh century, demonization and condemnation became the rule. Barriers of all kinds, some of them present since the fourth century,[21] were reinforced in the eleventh: those defending the *libertas ecclesiae*; the ritual ones that surrounded clerics, elevating them above the laity; the church buildings themselves, which became more important than the 'church' as assembly, becoming in fact "*une sainte personne de pierre*";[22] those that

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19) On this issue, see Alexander Patschowsky, "Freiheit der Ketzer," in: Johannes Fried (ed.), *Die abendländische Freiheit vom 10. zum 14. Jahrhundert* (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1991), 265–286, esp. 265–268.

20) That is, violence exercised, in true Augustinian spirit, in order to correct or improve (*corrigere*), rather than to punish (*punire*): see Robert Joly, "Saint Augustin et l'intolerance religieuse," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire – Belgisch tijdschrift voor philologie en geschiedenis* 33 (1955), 263–294; Klaus Schreiner, "'Duldsamkeit' (tolerantia) oder 'Schrecken' (terror). Reaktionsformen auf Abweichungen von der religiösen Norm, untersucht und dargestellt am Beispiel des augustinischen Toleranz- und Gewaltkonzepts und dessen Rezeption im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit," in: Dieter Simon (ed.), *Religiöse Devianz: Untersuchungen zu sozialen, rechtlichen und theologischen Reaktionen auf religiöse Abweichung im westlichen und östlichen Mittelalter* (Frankfurt/M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1990), 159–210.

21) Lellia Cracco Ruggini, "Pagani, ebrei e cristiani: odio sociologico e odio teologico nel mondo antico," in: *Gli ebrei nell'alto medioevo* (Spoleto: Presso la sede del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1980), vol. I, 13–101; see also the discussion, pp. 91–101.

22) On the tension between *ecclesia* as congregation and as building and on the role of the church-as-building in the structuring of Western Christendom, see Dominique Iogna-Prat, *La Maison Dieu: une histoire monumentale de l'Église au Moyen Âge (v. 800 – v. 1200)* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), esp. 441. The monumentalization of Christianity explains why "in their eagerness that the word *ecclesia* be understood to mean the congregation of the faithful,"

demonized heretics, Jews and, now, Muslims.[23] But boundaries of a different sort were also being built: around the uniqueness of the individual—the uniqueness of his intentionality, of his interiority, of his guilt.[24] Individuality was emphasized in terms of one's salvation,[25] but also of one's damnation; an example of the latter can be seen when, in 1245, Innocent IV abolished the practice of collective excommunication.[26] Significant in terms of the erection of boundaries is the fact that, as Peter Biller has demonstrated, already in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries 'religion' was understood in the reified manner that is commonly believed to have started only in the sixteenth century.[27] In terms of our concern with the role of boundaries, extrications, and self-consciousness in the emergence of modernity, Biller's questioning of John Bossy's assumption that medieval Christians "were not capable of looking at the Christian religion from the outside," shows that C. John Sommerville's observation about "the first stage in the decline of religious belief" being "an increased self-consciousness about

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English Protestants "sometimes wrote disparagingly of church buildings as 'steeple-houses'" (C. John Sommerville, "The Destruction of Religious Culture in Pre-Industrial England," *Journal of Religious History* 15 [1988], 76–93, p. 83).

23) See Dominique Iogna-Prat, *Ordonner et exclure: Cluny et la société chrétienne face à l'hérésie, au judaïsme et à l'islam* (second edition, Paris: Flammarion 2000 [first edition 1998]), 354–359; it is difficult to understand, however, why Iogna-Prat can write that "Par une curieuse et troublante coïncidence (!), discours et contre-discours naissent de façon quasi concomitant […]" (p. 355). See also Ernst Werner, "Das Bild des anderen: Antihumanismus und Intoleranz im 12. Jahrhundert," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 34 (1986), 877–891, reprinted in Ernst Werner, *Religion und Gesellschaft im Mittelalter* (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1995), 661–685.

24) See Alain Boureau, "L'individu, sujet de la vérité et suppôt de l'erreur. Connaissance et dissidence dans la monde scolastique (vers 1270 – vers 1330)," in: Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak & Dominique Iogna-Prat (eds.), *L'individu au Moyen Âge: individuation et individualisation avant la modernité* (Paris: Aubier, 2005), 289–306, 360–363.

25) Emphasized by Colin Morris in his response to C.W. Bynum's critique of *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050–1200* (London: SPCK, 1972), reprinted Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987; see Colin Morris, "Individualism in Twelfth-Century Religion: Some Further Reflections," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 31 (1980), 195–206, p. 205.

26) Dominique Iogna-Prat, "Introduction générale," in: Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak & Dominique Iogna-Prat (eds.), *L'individu au Moyen Âge: individuation et individualisation avant la modernité* (Paris: Aubier, 2005), 7–29, p. 20.

27) See Peter Biller, "Words and the Medieval Notion of 'Religion'." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36 (1985), 351–369.

those beliefs as one is able to view them from the outside,"[28] applies not only to England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but also to the medieval period.

Despite the threat of violence, and in fact, as argued above, partly as a reaction against clerical attempts at total control, there is evidence concerning the presence of various degrees of unbelief in medieval and early modern Europe,[29] before terms such as *atheos* and *athéiste* were coined around 1540 and 1549 respectively—"libertine" and "deist" having also appeared during the sixteenth century.[30] This unbelief became more belligerent during the various waves of Christianization, the most sustained of which took place, in their Catholic and various Protestant as well as radical forms, in the aftermath of the Reformation, that is, not long before the emergence of our modernity.

The Protestant Reformation itself can be understood as having emerged in part as a revolt against the Roman church's extreme rationalization of its salvific practices, involving the quantification, commodification, and marketing of merits and demerits.[31] But it must be kept in mind that despite the bitter opposition among the various Christian groups, the main confessions

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[28] Sommerville, "The Destruction of Religious Culture in Pre-industrial England," 93.

[29] On medieval atheism, including "*le naturalisme matérialiste des paysans,*" see Georges Minois, *Histoire de l'athéisme: l'incroyance dans le monde occidental des origines à nos jours* (Paris: Fayard, 1998), 68–104; Friedrich Niewöhner & Olaf Pluta (eds.), *Atheismus im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999). On atheism during the early modern age, see the respective chapters of Minois, *Histoire de l'athéisme,* as well as Peter Hersche, "Unglaube im 16. Jahrhundert: ein leicht ketzerischer Beitrag zum Lutherjubiläum in Form einer Literaturbesprechung," *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte / Revue suisse d'histoire / Rivista storica svizzera* 34 (1984), 233–250, esp. 237; Richard van Dülmen, "Wider die Ehre Gottes: Unglaube und Gotteslästerung in der frühen Neuzeit," *Historische Anthropologie* 2 (1994), 20–38, esp. 22, 33–34; Gerd Schwerhoff, "Die alltägliche Auferstehung des Fleisches: religiöser Spott und radikaler Unglaube um 1500," *Historische Anthropologie* 12 (2004), 309–337, esp. 313, 329.

[30] As Henri Busson and Jean Wirth have rightly pointed out, an attitude can exist before the label for it has been coined, for otherwise there would have been neither 'rationalism' nor 'fideism' before the nineteenth century: see Henri Busson, "Les noms des incrédules au XVI^{e} siècle," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 16 (1954), 273–283, pp. 274–275; Jean Wirth, "'Libertins' et 'Epicuriens': aspects de l'irréligion au XVI^{e} siècle," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 39 (1977), 601–627, pp. 601–602.

[31] Arnold Angenendt et al., "Gezählte Frömmigkeit," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 29 (1995), 1–71.

had in common their concern with the clarification of their doctrines, the systematization of their piety, and the efficiency of their organization.[32] Indeed, the interiorization of religion promoted by the reformers opposed one component of modernity against another, so that cultivation of one's subjectivity clashed with spiritual accountancy. This confrontation was in turn taken over in its totality by the Roman Church during the Counter-Reformation, when the Church sought to strengthen its control of the supernatural realm by rationalizing even further its spiritual accountancy, as well as by intensifying, mainly through the Jesuits, the modern order par excellence,[33] the theatrical aspects of ritual, while at the same time promoting the fear of damnation[34] and, in general, the interiorization of religion. That the resulting tensions within Roman Catholicism could not—and indeed cannot—be resolved is shown by the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century controversies between Jansenists and Jesuits.

It can be said, then, that the episode of western modernity that emerged in the seventeenth century is to be understood as one more instance of the delimitation of domains; one that came about partly as the reaction against the reactivation of an overpowering presence—in its Catholic and various Protestant forms—whose equivalent is not found outside the west; and partly as the result of the fact itself that a split had taken place within western

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32) See Jean Delumeau, "Réinterpretation de la Renaissance: les progrès de la capacité d'observer, d'organiser et d'abstraire," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 14 (1967), 296–314, p. 309; Wolfgang Reinhard, "Gegenreformation als Modernisierung? Prolegomena zu einer Theorie des konfessionellen Zeitalters," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 68 (1977), 226–252.

33) On the 'modernity' of the Jesuits, see Bernhard Groethuysen, *Die Entstehung der bürgerlichen Welt- und Lebensanschauung in Frankreich,* vol. 2: *Die Soziallehren der katholischen Kirche und das Bürgertum* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1927), reprinted Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1978, 60ff.; Reinhard, "Gegenreformation als Modernisierung?," 239ff.; Leszek Kołakowski, *God Owes Us Nothing: A Brief Remark on Pascal's Religion and the Spirit of Jansenism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 59, 72, 99, 105. The need on the part of the Roman Church to accommodate itself to the ever changing requirements of the *saeculum* requires the appearance of religious orders capable of responding to such needs. Now that the Jesuits seem to have become less willing to act as the Vatican's *force de frappe*, that function has been assumed by the *Opus Dei*; on this issue see Gustavo Benavides, "Latin American Catholicism, *comprometido* and compromised," *Social Compass* 44 (1997), 529–544.

34) See Bernhard Groethuysen, *Die Entstehung der bürgerlichen Welt- und Lebensanschauung in Frankreich*, vol. 1: *Das Bürgertum und die katholische Weltanschauung* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1927; reprinted Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1978), 113–122; Jean Delumeau, *Le péché et la peur. La culpabilisation en Occident (XIII^e–XVIII^e siècles)* (Paris: Fayard, 1983), 211–235 *et passim*.

Christendom: a cleavage not simply in terms of the confessional divide, but, more importantly, in terms of the possibility of discussing openly momentous issues concerning faith and ritual, freedom of conscience and tolerance, the mediated or non-mediated nature of the relation between oneself and one's god. This happened, for instance, in the *Discours contenant le vray entendement de la Pacification de Gand* of 1579, in which it is said that "because of a freedom that is our natural right one can satisfy one's conscience and *avoir la religion libre*" ("[…] chacun peut satisfaire à sa conscience, avoir la religion libre. Laquelle liberté nous appartient du droit de nature").[35]

It is this public venting of controversies previously conducted in Latin within the closed world of clerics that is one of the key ingredients of our modernity. Once the controversies started, the parties involved in it multiplied, with the result that, as Joseph Lecler has observed, whereas at the beginning of the Reformation freedom of conscience meant accepting the objective divine truth, later, as the result of the proliferation of sects, freedom of conscience came to refer to the "sacred and inviolable nature of our subjective convictions" ("caractère sacré et inviolable des convictions subjectives"[36]). It is because of the radical reformers that one finds—always under threat, frequently camouflaged[37]—ideas of tolerance, of freedom of conscience, and of a mysticism that is ultimately a form of skepticism or even of atheism, similar to those current now.[38] That such attitudes could be tolerated neither in Rome, nor in Wittenberg, nor, *a fortiori*, in Geneva, while the same radical attitudes are not the occasion for scandal in most parts of the contemporary west—with the exception of the United States of America[39]—should remind us of the extent to which radical religious

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35) Bibliothèque Nationale Ms. 5055, 31–32, 63–64, quoted in Joseph Lecler S.J., "Liberté de conscience: Origines et sens divers de l'expression," *Recherches de science religieuse* 54 (1966), 370–406, p. 399.

36) Lecler, "Liberté de conscience," 405.

37) Perez Zagorin, *Ways of Lying: Dissimulation, Persecution, and Conformity in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

38) Wirth, " 'Libertins' et 'Epicuriens,' " 621.

39) The mention of the United States, the example triumphantly adduced against the secularization thesis, should serve as a reminder of the fact that religious dissent—the ostensive cause for the establishment of some of the thirteen colonies—can be neutralized by the absence of a centralized power from which one dissents; and, more generally, as an example of the unpredictable ways in which the forces that generate modernity can behave, leading to the coexistence of technological innovation and social conservatism. In terms of the role

dissenters, such as Calvin's victim, Michel Servetus, or Rome's, Giordano Bruno, were involved in the genesis of modernity.[40]

This radical dissent is found throughout the early modern period, including in countries that used to be regarded as monolithically Catholic, such as Spain.[41] In fact, as an area of western Christendom wrestled back from Muslim domination over a period of almost eight centuries, the Iberian peninsula constitutes an example of the role that differentiation plays in the reinforcement of orthodoxy among ordinary people, while that very orthodoxy causes as a backlash a culture of blasphemy and anti-clericalism. It was the struggle against the Muslims that played a crucial role in the emergence of the identification of 'Spanish,' 'Portuguese,' and 'Christian,' an identification that led to the peculiarities of Iberian Catholicism.[42] This comprised as much the bloodiness of the crucifixion scenes, as the confrontations, doctrinal and ritual, between Old Christians and *moriscos*—the ritual confrontations that consisted in inviting *moriscos* to partake of sumptuous pork dishes during the Ramadan.[43] The identification of 'Spanish' and 'Christian' can be seen also in terms of basic doctrinal knowledge: as measured by the number of religious books published and

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of religion and the concomitant attitudes towards sexuality, death penalty, violence, weapons, role played by family connections in the succession to political office and, most importantly, social inequality, the United States is radically different from the post-war Western European model, being in some respects as culturally archaic as some of the most radical Muslim countries, with which it routinely sides, along with the Vatican, when issues related to sexuality and reproduction are voted on at the United Nations.

40) Hersche, "Unglaube im 16. Jahrhundert," 238ff. On Servetus, Calvin, and Sebastian Castellio, see Perez Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 93–144.

41) See José Antonio Maravall, *La cultura del Barroco. Análisis de una estructura histórica* (second edition, Barcelona: Ariel, 1980), 106ff. This important book is also available in English translation: *Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Henry Kamen, "Toleration of Dissent in Sixteenth-Century Spain: The Alternative Tradition," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 19 (1988), 3–23; John Edwards, "Religious Faith and Doubt in Late Medieval Spain: Soria circa 1450–1500," *Past and Present* 120 (1988), 3–25; C. John Sommerville, "Religious Faith, Doubt and Atheism," *Past and Present* 128 (1990), 152–155; John Edwards, "Reply," *Past and Present* 128 (1990), 155–161; Maureen Flynn, "Blasphemy and the Play of Anger in Sixteenth-Century Spain," *Past and Present* 149 (1995), 29–56.

42) See also Steffen Dix's article in the present issue of the *Journal of Religion in Europe*.

43) See Bartolomé Bennassar, *The Spanish Character: Attitudes and Mentalities from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 73–74.

especially by people's knowledge of the ten commandments, prayers, and the like, clerically controlled religiousness did increase from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century.[44]

But just as the presence of a non-Christian adversary led to the peculiar character of Iberian Catholicism, so did the presence of an all-powerful ecclesiastical apparatus contributed to the spread of Erasmian ideas in learned circles. For the same reason, there appeared in Spain, as elsewhere in Europe, popular forms of skepticism that are only now being explored, as well as a virulent anti-clericalism. The latter included not just ordinary blasphemy, but also desecrations, such as assaults on crucifixes[45] and attacks on priests, the bloodiest of which occurred during the Spanish Civil War, only seven decades ago. An indicator of the passing away of this totalizing, sacralizing view of the world, which was for that very reason "*une civilisation du blasphème*,"[46] is the decay, or even disappearance, of blasphemy in the modern west, a decline that has recently led to confrontations with societies in which, like apostasy,[47] blasphemy still constitutes a punishable offense. Nevertheless, despite that passing away, one can see that peculiar Spanish anti-clericalism

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44) R. Po-chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal 1540–1770* (second edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 52.

45) On such assaults, see William A. Christian, Jr., *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 190; for French cases, see Minois, *Histoire de l'athéisme*, 124–125; on Spanish anti-clericalism, see Bennassar, *Spanish Character,* 97–102.

46) The term was used for the first time by Jean Delumeau in *La peur en Occident XIV^e^–XVIII^e^ siècles* (Paris: Fayard, 1978), 400–403; it is also employed by Robert Muchembled in *L'invention de l'homme moderne: culture et sensibilités en France du XV^e^ au XVIII^e^ siècle* (second edition, Paris: Fayard, 1994), 76–81; for a critique of this formulation, see Alain Cabantous, *Histoire du blasphème en Occident XVI^e^–XIX^e^ siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998), 199–202.

47) Pope Benedict XVI's use of the word "apostasy" (in a speech delivered on 24 March 2007) to refer to Europe's turning away from universal and absolute values and from the Christian god betrays a dangerous nostalgia for a world constituted by the twin poles of sacredness/reverence and blasphemy/apostasy, a nostalgia which may not be unrelated to the threat/example of radical European Islam: "Is it not surprising that today's Europe, while aspiring to be regarded as a community of values, seems ever more often to deny the very existence of universal and absolute values? Does not this unique form of 'apostasy' from itself, even more than its apostasy from God, lead Europe to doubt its own identity" ("Non è motivo di sorpresa che l'Europa odierna, mentre ambisce di porsi come una comunità di valori, sembri sempre più spesso contestare che ci siano valori universali ed assoluti? Questa singolare forma di 'apostasia' da se stessa, prima ancora che da Dio, non la induce

still in action at various levels: from the baroque sexual-religious antinomianism found in Pedro Almodóvar's films, to the law that allows homosexual marriage, passed by the socialist government in April 2006, shortly after assuming power, against strenuous conservative and Church opposition: at the Vatican, cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo, calling the law "*inhumana*," as well as the result of a "strange idea of modernity" ("*de una extraña idea de la modernidad*"), asked Spanish public servants to act as conscientious objectors and refuse performing such marriages.

3. Orthodoxies, Heterodoxies, Heresies

In order to understand the significance of heresies in European history it is instructive to contrast these cases of dissidence with Chinese and Indian ones. The crucial difference has to do with the absence in those cultures of a centralized instance of religious power, one that sought to exercise ritual and administrative control over the behavior and, especially, the consciences of ordinary people. In China, imperial cults were restricted to the emperor, his family, and his representatives, local cults being relatively free from centralized control; the same being true, *a fortiori*, of domestic rituals. Not that persecutions did not take place—quite the contrary. But even after persecutions such as the one that took place in the Northern Wei, during which "the imperial edicts of 444–446 attacked the Buddhists for practicing what was referred to as *yao xie* (evil heresy), and Buddhism itself as a barbarian-inspired heretical delusion (*xie wei*),"[48] Buddhism eventually managed to become part of the fabric of Chinese life. Indeed, the great persecution of Buddhism towards the end of the Tang (844–845) did not have as its goal the annihilation of Buddhism, but rather the reduction of

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forse a dubitare della sua stessa identità?"). The "Discorso di sua santità Benedetto XVI ai partecipanti ai al congresso promosso dalla commissione degli episcopati della Communità Europea," Sabato 24 Marzo 2007, can be found in *L'Osservatore Romano*: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2007/march/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070324_comece_it.html (accessed 23 October 2007). This issue is discussed in G Benavides, "The Death and Resurrection of Apostasy," paper presented at the conference *Sekülerleşme ve Dinî Canlanma / Secularism and Religious Resurgence in Prospect and Retrospect,* Ankara, 22 October 2007.

48) Kwang-Ching Liu, "A Note on the Use of the Chinese Terms for Heterodoxy," in: Kwang-Ching Liu & Richard Shek (eds.), *Heterodoxy in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 477–489, p. 482.

the power of the *sangha* and, especially, the access to the enormous wealth it had accumulated;[49] Buddhism, in fact, flourished once again under the Sung, the dynasty that followed the Tang.[50]

In India, what one finds before the Muslim invasions is the interplay between its local forms and a diffused rather than centralized Sanskritic tradition. This lack of centralized religious authority accounts for the emergence of movements such as Jainism and Buddhism, and perhaps also for the fact that the latter was reabsorbed into its Indian matrix about a millennium and a half after its emergence. Regarding the situation after the Muslim invasions, despite the confrontations between Hindus and Muslims, at the local level the boundaries between these traditions have tended to be permeable, especially in relation to the worship of *pīr* and Hindu ascetics.[51] There are in fact movements, especially in Bengal, which could be classified as Hindu, Muslim, both, or perhaps neither; one of them, the Dharma cult, includes, in addition to Hindu and Buddhist, important Muslim elements.[52]

In Latin Christendom the situation was quite different. In terms of liturgy, even though one's physical location in the church building was determined by one's status, the ordinary Latin mass was the same for everyone. Communion was distributed in the same manner by priests, ordained by bishops who claimed to be part of a line extending back to Peter and ultimately to Jesus. Likewise, all Christians were, in principle, if not in practice, expected to examine their consciences when confessing their sins to priests, who were supposed to explore the most intimate details of their parishioners' lives, especially those having to do with sexuality. Absolution, in turn, was granted by the

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49) See Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) (revised translation of *Les aspects économiques du bouddhisme dans la société chinoise du V^e^ au X^e^ siècle* [Saigon: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1956]), 21–22, 140.

50) See Peter N. Gregory "The Vitality of Buddhism under the Sung," in: Peter N. Gregory & Daniel A. Getz Jr. (eds.), *Buddhism in the Sung* (Honolulu: University of Hawa'i Press, 1999), 1–20.

51) See the text translated in Tony K. Stewart, "Satya Pīr: Muslim Holy Man and Hindu God," in: Donald S. Lopez (ed.), *Religions of India in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 578–597.

52) An example of which is the Bengali Dharma cult: see Shashibhusan Das Gupta, *Obscure Religious Cults as Background of Bengali Literature* (third edition Calcutta: K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1969 [first published in 1946]), 259–267.

Christian god through the priests, but only to those who had truly repented from the sins they had committed—an act that presupposes an extraordinary level of introspection.[53]

It is true that Buddhist monks, too, claim unbroken ordination lines going back to the Buddha; but despite the fact that they not-infrequently work as ritual specialists, the monks do not claim sacramental powers; nor is there in Buddhism, despite the concern with maintaining ordination lines, a counterpart to a supranational centralized power, intent on the extirpation of competing communities, Buddhism having always coexisted—although not always in an amicable manner—with competing literate traditions, as in India and China, or with popular practices, as in Southeast Asia. In Japan, moreover, the presence of a textually based tradition such as Buddhism did not lead to the disappearance but rather to the naming of the indigenous practices—Shintō—with which Buddhism coexists to this day.[54] The contrast between the attitude towards religious allegiance in Japan and in Christendom is especially instructive, for it is not simply the case that in Japan people's allegiances are not exclusive, but also that the divinities themselves serve as mediators between traditions—for example, when the indigenous *kami* are understood as protectors or guardians of the Buddha; or when we read in the early-fourteenth-century *Ise monogatari zuinō* that a *kami* is "a Buddha who mingles his light with the dust in order to guide people."[55] It is true that with the concept of *shinjin* coined by Shinran in the thirteenth century,[56] Pure Land Japanese Buddhists carried to its extreme the Buddhist notion of 'faith'; it is true also that in the same century Nichiren espoused a form of Buddhism that was notable for its intolerance. Nevertheless, the crucial difference with the west remains: there was never a centralized, independent Japanese Buddhist church that sought to control all of Japanese religion, nor was there ever a Nichiren Geneva—the imposition of a Buddhist parochial system (*danka-seido*)

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53) On such interrogations during the fourteenth and the twentieth centuries, as well as on the debates concerning *contritio* and *attritio*, see Guy Bechtel, *La chair, le diable et le confesseur* (Paris: Plon, 1994), 238, 272, 287, 300–305.

54) Richard Bowring, *Religious Traditions of Japan, 500–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1, 91–93, 352.

55) See Susan Blakeley Klein, "*Ise Monogatari Zuinō*: An Annotated Translation," *Monumenta Nipponica* 53 (1998), 13–43, p. 30.

56) See James C. Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū: Shin Buddhism in Medieval Japan* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), reprinted Honolulu: University of Hawa'i Press, 2002.

during the Tokugawa period was carried out by the Shogunate,[57] rather than by a Buddhist church, analogous to the Roman one.

Hubert Seiwert has argued that as long as one is aware of the difference between the western and the Chinese means of expressing conformity one can speak of orthodoxy, heterodoxy, and civil religion in China.[58] Liu has gone further, proposing that *yao* ('wizardly') and *zuodao* ('deviant'), generally translated as 'heterodox,' be translated as 'heretical' when they refer to movements such as the Maitreyan revolt of 1047 and the Manichaean one of 1120–1122; he also points out that during the Ming dynasty, *xie*, the term for heterodoxy, "began to be used in a malignant context"; and that by the mid-Qing, *xiejiao*, "which needs to be translated as 'heresy' to suggest the abhorrence in which it was held, became the standard term" used to refer to sectarian rebels.[59] It should be noted, however, that these terms were used to refer to rebels, having little to do with the punishment of convictions that did not result in behavior considered as deviant. What is more significant in terms of the connection between intolerance and the cultivation of subjectivity is the hypothesis that the Chinese genre of *poxie*, "decisively refuting heresies," may have been initiated by Buddhists,[60] that is, by members of a 'world religion,' who were concerned—in theory, if not always in practice—with the exploration of their mental processes.

In any event, despite the existence of an overarching worldview, shared by Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist members of the elite, and despite the persecution of heterodox or even heretical groups, the fact remains that successive emperors could have different religious sympathies; indeed, Wuzong (r. 840–846), the emperor who ordered the largest persecution of

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57) See Joseph M. Kitagawa, *Religion in Japanese History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 163ff.

58) See Hubert Seiwert, "Orthodoxie, Orthopraxie und Zivilreligion im vorneuzeitlichen China," in: Holger Preißler (ed.), *Gnosisforschung und Religionsgeschichte: Festschrift für Kurt Rudolph zum 65. Geburtstag* (Marburg: diagonal, 1994), 529–541, p. 533: "[…] in China, the 'confessions' of orthodoxy did not have the form of linguistically expressed formulas of belief; they were *symbola* of a different kind. More important than words were deeds. Orthopraxis of action could be counted as an expression of orthodoxy of thought." For a view that stresses orthopraxis rather than orthodoxy, see Helwig Schmidt-Glinzer, "Viele Pfade oder ein Weg? Betrachtungen zur Durchsetzung der konfuzianischen Orthopraxie," in: Wolfgang Schluchter (ed.), *Max Webers Studie über Konfuzianismus und Taoismus* (Franfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1983), 298–341.

59) Liu, "A Note on the Use of the Chinese Terms for Heterodoxy," 481–482.

60) Ibid., 482–483.

Buddhism in Chinese history, was succeeded by Xuanzong (r. 846–859), who allowed the rebuilding of many of the temples destroyed under his predecessor. In general, a ruler given to upholding Confucian orthodoxy could be succeeded by an emperor who was sympathetic to Buddhism, who in turn could be followed by a Daoist. Such a state of affairs has no equivalent in European history, as that would have required not just Julian's single attempt to reinvigorate paganism in the fourth century, but an alternation between pagan and Christian—and presumably also Jewish and Muslim—successors of Constantine that went on for almost two millennia. The fact that such an arrangement would have been unimaginable in the west forces us to consider whether the existence of a centralized, intolerant, transcendentally legitimized supranational authority played a role in deepening the critical attitude of groups—defined as 'heresies'—which otherwise would have become part of a continuum of beliefs and practices similar to those found in the Indic and Chinese worlds.[61]

This does not mean that non-official forms of religion were not able to flourish in Europe during the millennium that separates Luther from Clovis; but even so, all the practices that can be considered as belonging to the necessarily ill-defined realm of 'popular,' 'folk,' or 'local' religion were subject—in principle, if not always in practice—to clerical approval, or at least toleration, so that, as a result, no practices or beliefs—except for those of the Jews—could openly appear as non-Christian.

4. Sexual Modernity

Given that one of the main functions of religion has been the regulation of sexuality and reproduction, one would expect that the emergence of modernity would have consequences in terms of people's attitudes towards these crucial aspects of life. Indeed, the very distinction between sexuality and reproduction, although always attempted with various degrees of success, could be finally achieved only as the result of the scientific discoveries that are one of Western modernity's accomplishments. Similarly, the distinction between sex—in the sense of genitality—and gender—in the sense of roles, attitudes, feelings, self-understanding—present to a lesser of greater extent

61) Hubert Seiwert, "Orthodoxie und Heterodoxie im lokalen Kontext Südchinas," in: Hans G. Kippenberg & Brigitte Luchesi (eds.), *Lokale Religionsgeschichte* (Marburg: diagonal, 1995), 145–155, pp. 153–154.

throughout history, especially among religious virtuosi (who not infrequently have considered themselves as the brides of a god), could be taken for granted only after it became possible to believe that one could free oneself from all kinds of constraints, including bodily and, in general, physical ones. The extrication of gender from sex is but the logical conclusion of the extrication of sex from reproduction (and of reproduction from sex, possible because of advances in medicine): all of these constitute processes of separation of domains, as well as further examples of the pivotal significance attached to one's feelings, subjectivity, and self-understanding when a 'modern' attitude prevails.

In relation to these aspects of life the role of the Roman Church is necessarily contradictory. On the one hand, as the link between the natural and supernatural realms, the church must seek to exercise control over all aspects of life, from conception to death, rejecting the various extrications referred to above, regardless of the consequences; consequently, the Church has had to involve itself in the most intimate details of sexual activity, from the correct position of the spouses during the sexual act to the proper destination of semen. However, since the Church must be suspicious towards anything that comes between the believer and his god, it must regard anything related to sexuality with the utmost suspicion, seeking above all to divorce it from pleasure. In addition, in order to fulfill its function as the intermediary between its god and mankind, the Church depends on a self-perpetuating body of men who function as the conduits through whom sacramental grace flows. In order to ensure the reliability of the process, these men must depend entirely on the Church, either through their bishops or through the religious orders to which they belong. Such absolute dependence requires the exclusion of other allegiances, the most important of which is the one constituted by one's sexual partner and by the progeny that results from that union. Furthermore, insofar as the function of the priests is primarily a ritual one, the smooth functioning of the process requires ritual purity, which, as in many cultures, is predicated upon at least temporary sexual abstinence.

Had the Roman Church sought to serve as a ritual conduit, without seeking to establish itself as a supranational power, it could have demanded priestly sexual abstinence only at the times that surround the exercise of sacramental performance—as it is the case with Orthodox priests. Conversely, had the Church abandoned its primarily sacramental self-understanding, while still clinging to its supranational claims, it could have possibly relinquished its single-minded concern with lay sexuality and clerical continence. The nature of the Church's self-understanding is such, however,

that it cannot give up either claim without ceasing to be what it has been since the days of Gregory VII, almost a millennium ago.[62]

The practical consequences in sexual terms of the weakening of the once all-powerful Church vary depending on the nature of the societies within which the Church seeks to maintain its influence. In Western Europe, including once Catholic countries such as Italy and Spain, the combination of the Church's archaizing view and the debilitation of its liturgy will continue to contribute to its demise, as the shrinking population continues to extricate sexuality from reproduction[63] (unless, as discussed below, as a reaction against the presence of Islam in Europe a re-embracing of Christendom does take place). In Protestant countries, the extrication of sexual and reproductive domains is likely to continue, as the reformed churches have given up attempts to influence such aspects of life.

In the context of a discussion of modernity and religion it must be pointed out that when discussing issues related to sexuality and reproduction the Roman Church, at its highest level, does not disdain to resort to 'modern' arguments, that is, to taking into account medical research, economic forecasting, and the like. One example of this is the claim made by cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo, that condoms do not protect against HIV/AIDS. The president of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for the Family stated that "the Aids virus is roughly 450 times smaller than the spermatozoon. The spermatozoon can easily pass through the 'net' that is formed by the condom."[64] This claim, condemned by the World Health Organization, is significant not because it involves a willful misrepresentation of facts, but insofar as the Roman Church, when it could still exercise some authority, would not have sought to argue on the basis of allegedly scientific data; instead, it would have limited itself to condemning the use of condoms, regardless of their reliability. No less significant as an example of the use of

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62) This and related issues are discussed in more detail in Gustavo Benavides, "Sex, Continence, Power," *Religion*, forthcoming.

63) Without forgetting that the attitudes of actual priests can differ from the official position of the Church; instructive in this regard is the advice given by priests during the 'confessions' in 24 Italian churches, from Milano to Palermo, carried out by a journalist from 7 to 21 January 2007: see Riccardo Bocca, "Benedette assoluzioni," *L'Espresso* (28 January 2007), available online at http://espresso.repubblica.it/dettaglio/Benedette-assoluzioni/1487349&ref=hpstr1 (accessed 23 October 2007).

64) See Steve Bradshaw, "Vatican: Condoms Don't Stop Aids," *The Guardian* (9 October 2003).

modern arguments is the speech that Pope John Paul II delivered to the Italian parliament in November 2002. Among other things, Wojtyła spoke about a "birth crisis, demographic decline and ageing of the population," while also referring to the human, social and economic problems that this crisis will cause in Italy in the next decades.[65] What is significant about this speech is the fact that in making his case about the inextricable union of sexuality and reproduction, the pope, instead of making a purely moral or theological statement, resorted to arguments based on economic rationality. That a pope as adept at making use of all the tools provided by modern technology may have in fact made a conscious decision to use 'modern' arguments based on economic needs and demographic trends is likely; on the other hand, it should not be forgotten that in dealing with the connections among sexuality, demography, and economics, the pope was still functioning in the traditional Catholic manner—one that seeks to regulate all of reality, especially the processes involving birth, copulation, and death.

5. Religious Counter-Modernities

As the result of the skepticism towards ritually validated spiritual authority, which was itself caused in part by the cultivation of subjectivity, the Vatican II Church was forced to divest itself of some of its ritual apparatus. This was described at the time as an *aggiornamento*—in other words, as becoming up-to-date, as one more example of modernization, that is, of the process of taking distance from the past, described in this essay. However, since a religious body whose *raison d'être* is to serve as a ritual conduit between the natural and the supernatural realms cannot afford to surrender its ritual apparatus, after that brief period of *aggiornamento* the Roman Church is now attempting to re-establish its ritual system. But given that the critical attitude towards ritual-based religion along with the concomitant cultivation of subjectivity have made too many inroads to permit a re-establishment of Catholic dominance, it is doubtful whether the Church will be able to reassert its hegemonic position in Europe and in Latin America. On the contrary, cultivation of subjectivity combined with levels of prosperity

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65) For a discussion of this speech in the context of the role still played by religion in the management of fertility, see Gustavo Benavides, "Ecology and Religion," in: Bron R. Taylor (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* (London & New York: Thoemmes-Continuum, 2005), 548–554.

unimaginable only half a century ago have led to the proliferation of New Age religions in Europe; while the emphasis on subjectivity combined with deprivation and uncertainty have resulted in the growth of Evangelical—above all Pentecostal—movements in Latin America.[66]

To counteract its lack of relevance among native Europeans, the Roman Church has expanded its activities among immigrants of Christian background, for some of whom joining religious orders has become—as it was in old Europe and in the old New World—a way of securing social ascent. This phenomenon, visible on the streets of European cities, particularly in Italy, may counteract in the short term the precipitous decline of vocations among the natives; but, on the other hand, this may also lead in the long term to the Church being perceived as an even more alien institution—alien now not just in its attitude to ritual, gender, and sexuality but also in the provenance of its overseers.[67] What may contribute to a rebirth of European Christianity is the increased presence of immigrants of non-Christian, mainly Muslim, background, some of whom are likely to continue embracing—or will re-embrace—their Muslim identity as a response to real or imaginary grievances. In these circumstances one can regard as altogether plausible the reactive emergence of a kind of Schengen Christianity—or, better, of a Schengen Christendom[68]—that is, a re-embrace of the old European ritual system that, within the limits already pointed out, has constituted the underpinning of European identity. If this were to happen, in addition to a revival of the territorial understanding of Christendom, we could see a revival of what Robert Bartlett has called the "racializing trend" of the twelfth-century, according to which all Europeans, regardless of origin or language, constituted, as Gregory VII put it in one of his *Epistolae Vagantes* (65), "the Christian race" (*christiana gens*).[69]

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66) On the Latin American case, see David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 71–118.

67) For an example, see *La Repubblica* (8 December 2006), available online at http://www.repubblica.it/2006/12/sezioni/cronaca/prete-straniero/prete-straniero/prete-straniero.html (accessed 23 October 2007).

68) The reference is to the 1985 treaty that abolished border controls among some European countries, an abolition that has resulted—in theory—in the reinforcement of the borders of Western Europe.

69) See Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950–1350* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 252, referring to *The Epistolae Vagantes of Gregory VII*, edited and translated by H.E.J. Cowdrey (Oxford: Clarendon Press,

Another, although less likely, possibility, related also to the presence of Islam in Europe, must be considered. What may happen is that the popular religious practices, including New Age, found among the population of Christian background may function as the paganism against which European Islam appears as an alternative, much as Christianity appeared as an option to pagans before Constantine. According to this scenario, instead of Europeans re-embracing Christianity as a reaction against Islam, Europeans would embrace the certainties of Islam as a reaction against the terminal weakening of the European variant of Christian creed and ritual[70]—against the decay of reverence, decried by Benedict XVI during his visit to Bavaria in September 2006.

What is most likely, however, is that Islam will continue to grow through immigration, as the majority of Europeans, aware of their colonial past as well as fearful of the return of the violence that until only six decades ago plagued most of the continent, cling to Enlightenment ideals of tolerance, being fearful of appearing—to others, but above all to themselves—as intolerant towards non-European legal or illegal immigrants.[71] Indeed, it is no coincidence that such attitude prevailed until not long ago in the Netherlands, the first modern nation. That such unconditional tolerance tends to lead to the consolidation of communities based on ethnic-cum-religious identities—that is, of communities based on principles that contradict the very premises of modernity—constitutes one more example of the paradoxical—and perhaps even self-cancelling—outcome of modernity. No less paradoxical is the fact that those members of immigrant groups who wish to maintain an anti-modern religious or ethnic identity take advantage of the self-monitoring regarding the slightest hint of intolerance in which post-Christian Europeans engage, while those immigrants

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1972), 146/148 (Latin text), 147/149 (English translation). See also Gustavo Benavides, "Islam and European Identity from the *Mozarabic Chronicle* to the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons," *Bulletin of the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion* 35 (2007), 94–97.

70) See, most recently, Lutz Ackermann, "Konvertiten," *Der Spiegel* (15 January 2007), 38; see also "Wehe, wer den Muezzin stört," *Spiegel Online* (4 January 2007), available online at http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/0,1518,456899,00.html (accessed 23 October 2007); "Übertritt zum Islam: Zahl der Konvertiten hat sich vervierfact," *Spiegel Online* (13 January 2007), available online at http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,459544,00.html (accessed 23 October 2007).

71) For an extreme example see "Deutsche Richterin stützt sich auf Koran," *Frankfurter Rundschau* (20 March 2007).

who seek to free themselves from an all-encompassing transcendentally based morality take a stand against that same unconditional tolerance.[72]

6. Reflexivity, Modern and Anti-Modern

The selective use of the reflexivity promoted by modernity is found not only among immigrant groups, intent on reinforcing their identity by clinging, for example, to traditional notions of honor[73] or of gender roles, and by demanding being subject to special legal arrangements; it is also found, these days, among a long-established group, which functioned, when it could afford it, as a paragon of intolerance. A curious development in this regard is the Roman Church's tactic support for religious bodies which not long ago it considered as adversaries. Taking advantage of the debate about the relation between *laïcité* and the demands of Muslim immigrant groups currently taking place in France, the French Catholic Church has advocated, with the necessary obliqueness, a change in the laws that have regulated the status of religious bodies in the French Republic since 1905. In January 2004, the archbishop of Paris, cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, spoke against the law that prohibited ostentatious religious symbols, claiming that by dealing with the delicate issue of trying to determine which is the legitimate public expression of religion, one touches one of the principles of religious freedom ("on touche à l'un des principes de la liberté religieuse en entrant dans ce point très délicat de savoir quelle est l'expression publique légitime des faits religieux"). The cardinal also denounced "the awakening of an anti-religious aggressiveness" ("[…] le

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72) See, for example, an article by Necla Kelek, a Turkish-born sociologist, "Moscheen sind Männerhäuser," *Frankfurter Rundschau* (30 April 2007). Kelek's piece acquires a new dimension if one reads it in the context of the issues discussed in Iogna-Prat, *La Maison Dieu*. The exchanges on multiculturalism among Ian Buruma, Timothy Garton Ash, Bassam Tibi, Pascal Bruckner, and others can be found in "Die Multikulturalismus-Debatte," http://www.perlentaucher.de/artikel/3642.html (accessed 23 October 2007).

73) See Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," in: J.G. Peristiany (ed.), *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 21–39; reprinted as "The Anthropology of Honour," in: Julian Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem or the Politics of Sex: Essays in the Anthropology of the Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1–17; Bennassar, *The Spanish Character*, 213–236; J.G. Peristiany & Julian Pitt-Rivers (eds.), *Honor and Grace in Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

réveil d'une agressivité anti-religieuse qui surprend complètement les milieux catholiques […]").[74] A month later, cardinal Mario Pompedda questioned the right to impose a specific physical education attire to a young woman, if that goes against her most profound convictions ("En vertu de quoi peut-on imposer une tenue particulière à une fille, pour un cours d'éducation physique, si cela va contre ses convictions les plus profondes?"). Echoing the *Discours contenant le vray entendement de la Pacification de Gand* of 1579, referred to above, the former Prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura said that if the principle that underlies the French law is accepted, instead of safeguarding liberty, this liberty will be violated, as the laws being imposed take away a person's fundamental right to live his life according to his conscience ("au lieu de sauvegarder la liberté, on la violera, en imposant des lois et des conceptions qui finissent par ôter à la personne le droit fondamental d'orienter sa propre vie selon sa conscience.")[75]

Another telling example of this can be found in Pompedda's complaint about the absence of the president of the Spanish government from the mass celebrated by Benedict XVI in Valencia in July 2006. The cardinal said that in such absence he saw an act of "rather dark and obscurantist laicism" ("[…] un laicismo piuttosto oscuro e oscurantista").[76] Regarding the cardinal's reaction it must be pointed out that while the mythology of a struggle between light and darkness is as old as Christianity, being found also in other traditions, the accusation of "obscurantism" is typical of the Enlightenment. That a prince of the Roman Church, an institution that not too many decades ago was still fighting against the ideas of the eighteenth-century *philosophes*, considering the very concept of liberty of consciousness as *deliramentum*,[77] may now defend liberty of conscience and may, moreover, resort to an *Aufklärung* metaphor to condemn *laicismo*, is

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74) For the French original see http://www.chretiente.net/spip.php?article25 (accessed 23 October 2007).

75) For the French original see http://www.chretiente.net/spip.php?article29 (accessed 23 October 2007).

76) See *La Stampa*, Turin (8 July 2006). Along similar lines, Dalil Boubakeur, rector of the Institut Musulman de la Mosquée de Paris, declares that "obscurantism, intolerance and fanaticism are not Koranic teachings" ("obscurantisme, intolérance et fanatisme ne sont pas de l'Enseignement coranique") (*L'Islam en France: tolerance—laïcité—modernité*, p. 3; available online at http://www.mosquee-de-paris.net/Conf/Monde/III0105.pdf (accessed 23 October 2007).

77) See Lecler, "Liberté de conscience," 370, cf. p. 404.

not merely the result of opportunism, real as such opportunism no doubt is; what must be pondered, in addition to the unintended humor of the situation, is that declarations such as Pompedda's are proof of the extent to which the ideal of religious tolerance—demanded, still in a public manner, by the pagan Themistius in late antiquity, present surreptitiously during the Middle Ages and the early modern period, and finally proclaimed, once again openly, by modernity—has become a *lingua franca*, even for those who have no sympathy for such values.

7. Self-Canceling Modernity

What must also be pondered is the fact that while in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries western modernity's totalizing vocation tended to assume a confrontational stance towards opposing ideologies, particularly those of a religious nature, late modernity—*modernitas nostra*—seems to be exercising its totalizing vocation through the universal accommodation of all ideologies, including those intent on destroying it. A recurrent issue throughout this essay has been the extent to which the large-scale processes that have been examined seem to have functioned as homoeostatic mechanisms—that is, how, in a seemingly inexorable manner, processes that seemed to push in one direction ended up generating a counter-pressure, thus bringing about their own demise.

With that in mind, we may ask whether the accommodation referred to above will result in the assimilation and, ultimately, the neutralization of anti-modern religious ideologies, or whether these ideologies will destroy, with the help of western modernity, the west's most extreme exercise in reflexivity. If western modernity were to come to an end, then, this would happen partially as the result of the dynamics of modernity itself.

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